

Christopher H Cosgrove. An Analysis of COVID-19's Effect on Individualized Education Plan Documentation. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in I.S degree. April, 2021. 37 pages. Advisor: Denise Anthony

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, elementary schools in the United States have turned to remote teaching in an attempt to limit virus exposure between school staff and students. With students learning from their homes, in-school programs, such as the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) system, may experience unintended effects. This research aimed to analyze COVID-19's effect on the IEP documentation process through content analysis of different IEP documentation procedures, as well as interviews with elementary school staff. The proposed analysis would compare and contrast procedures and experiences both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, to answer the question: Are elementary-level special education teachers documenting and assessing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) differently during the COVID-19 pandemic, and if so, how? The goal of this research was to highlight the main differences in these procedures, along with the school staff's perception of the change in IEP documentation accuracy. Due to restrictions enforced by multiple school districts, the investigator was unable to collect the information needed to complete this research.

Headings:

Confidential records

Documentation standards

Medical records

Online education

Records management standards

School records

Student records

AN ANALYSIS OF COVID-19'S EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN
DOCUMENTATION

by

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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Information Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2021

Approved by

Denise Anthony

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Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, elementary schools in the United States have turned to remote teaching in an attempt to limit exposure between their staff and students. Through the means of online interaction and instruction, as well as hybrid approaches of learning (part-time in-person, part-time online), students are directly exposed to their teachers and peers at a decreased rate. Different forms of instruction are bound to change with the new environments that the pandemic has brought, which begs the questions: What is different with these educational curriculums, and do these differences affect the quality of students' education?

Normally conducted through in-person interactions, school staff that work with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)ⁱ have adjusted their evaluation methods for online learning, however, the quality of these changes have not been explored. This research aims to analyze COVID-19's effect on the IEP documentation process through content analysis of different IEP documentation procedures, as well as interviews with elementary school staff. The proposed analysis will compare and contrast procedures and experiences both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, which will answer the questions: Are elementary-level special education teachers documenting and assessing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) differently during the COVID-19 pandemic, and if so, how? The goal of this research is to highlight the main differences in these

procedures, along with the school staff's perception of the change in IEP documentation accuracy.

Literature Review

This literature review is the result of a number of academic publications, in addition to education and disability-related resources found over the internet. This section will aim to cover the basics of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), in order to provide a deeper understanding of what is involved in the IEP system. From development to implementation, these plans have a number of factors that influence their effectiveness.

An Individualized Education Plan is a specialized document that serves to provide accommodations for the academic and social needs of a student. It provides definitions of *what* the student is trying to achieve in an academic or behavioral setting, and *how* they are given opportunities to achieve these goals. While standardized information fields are used for the creation of these plans, they must be fine-tuned around a student's needs to form a "truly individualized document" (U.S. Department of Education). With this in mind, they are specifically developed by the student's special educators, administration, and their parents or legal guardians. This does not mean that the students themselves are entirely out of this process; there may be circumstances where the student is also involved in the development of the IEP (Cramerotti & Ianes, 2016).

Several elements to the student's education may be included in a fully-formed IEP, such as the ways instruction will be provided, the tools being used to provide instruction, as well as measurable methods to test and analyze the progress being made toward goal completion (University of Washington). Students may work toward goals

that fall under the academic or behavioral fields, and their IEP can contain multiple goals if needed. For example, there may be goals related to achieving a certain proficiency in reading by a certain time in the school year, or exhibiting particular behaviors toward other students.

However, these documents can be quite ambiguous, and cannot detail every aspect of how the student's education will be provided, as well as acting as "unnecessary paperwork" for educators (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). For example, while an IEP may outline the different elements of the student's plan, it may not take unplanned events, such as unexpected schedule changes and classroom disruptions, into consideration.

Students with an IEP are not placed only in the special education classrooms, but also in the general education and "specials"ⁱⁱⁱ classroom, in order to learn and experience the same curriculum materials as their peers (cerebalpalsy.org). However, students with an IEP are not a general educator's only responsibility; during instruction in a general education classroom, accommodations and services meant for a student with an IEP may not always be delivered (Underwood, 2016). Underwood provides a few causes to this, such as the educator's sense of responsibility for the student, their awareness and ability to provide the accommodations being defined for the student, as well as their levels of effectiveness and understanding when working with students with various learning disabilities. It was noted that during their own undergraduate education, as well as development workshops, general educators are not exposed to methods or strategies that allow them to effectively work with students with learning disabilities (Kosko & Wilkins,

2009). As a result, examples such as these can impede the academic or behavioral progress being made by the student.

Changes in environments have also been observed in the special education field. For example, a case study by Peter J. Blair explores the effectiveness of IEP development and implementation in a 3-D virtual environment called TeacherSim (Blair, 2017). This involved placing students and instructors in a playable environment, where users are represented by their customizable “avatars”, and are able to synchronously interact with others in the class. Aspects from the Temple Presence Inventory (Lombard et al., 2009), such as Spatial/Social Presence, Engagement, and Social Richness, were observed to grasp the effectiveness of the tool.

While current virtual learning environments, such as Zoom, a video chat-based program, are not as involved as TeacherSim, some hindrances found in Blair’s study may be transferrable to the current study. Technical difficulties can be shown in many electronic modes of communication, such as different internet capabilities or program errors that prevent users from completing certain tasks, such as joining the session. Since tools such as these are synchronous, it is necessary for users to be present during the entire session. If something prevented the student’s, or even educational professional’s, presence, they may miss out on vital information. User error may also contribute to the overarching problem. As users learn to utilize new technologies or tools, there is the chance that they will not always remember to follow the correct procedures, such as logging in to the tool or using its built-in features.

Maintaining the integrity of the IEP is dependent on almost all parties that engage with the student. The U.S. Department of Education emphasized a number of important factors for effectively implementing an IEP, which include:

- Acknowledgement of educators' responsibilities
- Teamwork between IEP members
- Communication between educators and parents/guardians
- Supervising of accommodations and services being provided
- Reporting of the student's progress at a constant rate

Special and general education teachers, as well as special education associates are main components of these teams, as their expertise on curriculum instruction and interactions with the student promote the completion of the IEP.

In the state of North Carolina, template IEP forms are created by the Exceptional Children Division of the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Schools or school districts are free to make adjustments that fit their needs, as long as it maintains the information required by the DPI (Wettach). This requirement is similar to U.S. Department of Education's information requirement. The proposed research will focus on an elementary school in North Carolina, particularly aimed toward one in the Research Triangle, which is made up of Durham, Orange, and Wake county.

A statewide form retrieved from the North Carolina State Board of Education provides a detailed example of how an IEP would be developed. Included in this form are the student's background (such as strengths), benchmark specifications, different forms of accommodations, as well as listing the members of the IEP team, who are responsible for providing services to the student. While forms such as this are used for the creation of

the IEP, there may also be forms that are meant to track the progress of a student through different periods of time, such as hourly, daily, or even weekly.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Due to the changes in educational environments during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the transition to synchronous online learning, an exploratory case study is needed for examining how Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) were documented, as well as analyzing the stakeholders' perceptions of their accuracy. Such a case study would aim to answer the following questions:

Are elementary school staff, such as special education teachers, documenting and assessing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) differently during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, how, and have these differences made an impact on teachers' perception of the IEP's accuracy?

Methodology

Due to restrictions enforced by multiple school districts, the investigator was unable to collect the information needed to complete this research. See Outcome section for more details. This research was designed as an exploratory case study, as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) may offer different standards and procedures between schools and school districts, as well as different standards on the state or national levels. With a case study, the investigator could have examined one school's policies and procedures, leading to a consistent analysis of how the school's educators have handled documentation both before and during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The population for this research was identified through a convenience sampling method. This method was chosen due to not having any specific parameters for subject characteristics (beyond their role within the school), and the researcher would have worked with the first available school that deployed remote or hybrid instruction in its 2020-2021 curriculum. If multiple schools had shown interest in the study, preference would have been given to schools that are strictly online for the 2020-2021 school year.

Recruitment for this case study took place across three levels of organizations within the school system. Starting at the top of the hierarchy, requests for research were sent to leaders within the school district. Such requests took the form of email communication or filling out request for research forms on the district's website, if applicable. Regardless of their destination, their format followed what is shown in

[Appendix A](#). These requests included a consent form for three separate parties, in addition to the interview questions for subjects. The parties involved in the school district included district administration, school principals, and teachers/associates. The details behind these documents can be found in [Appendix B](#). and [Appendix C](#)., respectively. Once permission was granted to contact individual schools, the same outreach methods were used toward principals, then school staff.

If educators had provided their consent agreements, interviews would be held that would focus on their experiences with the IEP system. Drawing mostly from Appendix C., the investigator would have aimed to understand the educator's working environment, as well as any changes that may have affected the consistency of documenting and managing a student's IEP. Note that this entry mentions that the interview is also open-ended; additional questions may arise given the opportunity.

The data that would have been collected from this population would have been representative of typical cases in the IEP documentation, and would not be focused on a specific case within the school's IEP system. During the content analysis portion of this research, only template policies and procedures would have been requested; this would have eliminated the possibility of students or staff being identified from the data used for comparison. More importantly, this would have allowed the investigator to avoid obtaining any Personal Identifiable Information (PII) from students.

Positionality / Researcher Role

For approximately two years, the investigator worked as a Special Education Associate in a public elementary school (K-5) setting. As an associate, they were involved with interacting with students placed in the special education and general

education classrooms, as well as documenting their Individualized Education Plan data onto the school's data management system. These responsibilities required various amounts of interaction between the investigator and student; the amount of interaction was dependent on the student's IEP and the activity being conducted. For example, during academic instruction, the investigator could provide direct assistance to the student, while in the student's "specials", only observation would be provided. The responsibilities of the associates at this school varied on a case-by-case basis; during the investigator's time there, they observed and conducted instruction for a small pool of students, often in one-on-one sessions (their time and attention would be solely focused on a single student during different times in their schedule).

The investigator's role is to observe and make comparisons between the (pre- and post-COVID-19 outbreak) IEP documentation methodologies. The investigator's past experiences with the IEP system will not have any conflicts of interest, as their role is only to observe documentation policies and procedures for two different time periods. Their past experiences will have no influence on the content of the analysis.

Sample / Research Participants

The desired population of this case study would have included individuals that *actively* work with the Individualized Education Plan system in an elementary school setting (K-5). Those who *actively* work with the IEP are those who work with students (in an IEP program) on a daily basis. These individuals can include, but are not limited to:

- Special education teachers
- Special education associates
- "General" education teachers

From interacting with these individuals, the proposed pulled sampling units would have included:

- Interviews from teachers, associates, and administrators
- Policies and procedures for IEP documentation and evaluation
- Policies and procedures for interactions with students
- Individualized Education Plan data sheet templates (if applicable)

Data Collection Methods

Requests for documented IEP policies and procedures would have been made for periods of time before the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as for periods after. Ideally, the investigator would compare the policies for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, as they are the most recent periods of documentation. Having these documents should allow the researcher to compare standardized procedures at a close level; the language and contexts used are assumed to be similar to one another. A potential limitation behind this is that established IEP templates can be ambiguous, and there is the possibility of various amounts of PII being shown in the documents shared with the investigator.

Interviews with those affiliated with the IEP system (teachers, associates, and administration) would have been conducted to gain more context into their system that goes beyond the standardized policies and procedures held by the school, school system, or any other governing body. In addition to this, interviews would have provided a look into the daily schedules of teachers, and how IEP documentation was affected by them. The investigator would have aimed to interview at least one individual in each of the three main roles, which include: (1) special education teacher, (2), general education teacher, and (3) special education associate. A potential limitation behind interviews is

the amount of content given from each session; different participants may not (or will not) provide as much information as others, or they not have enough experience or responsibilities with the IEP system to provide useful information.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis methods will be a combination of content and narrative analysis. Through analysis of existing data from research subject with the addition of their experiences with the data in question, the researcher should be able to compare and contrast the different policies and procedures.

The content in question will be the documented policies and procedures held by the school (or school district) in an attempt to document their Individualized Education Plans. The content analysis will be the result of comparison between the retrieved documents.

Interviews with those *directly* involved with the IEP documentation process (teachers, associates, administration, and etc.) will compose the narrative analysis, which may highlight any key differences in documentation methods outside of any written procedures. This method was also chosen for this case study to assess the school's perception of how COVID-19 has affected the accuracy of the IEP documentation. This will not be a quantitative approach, and will only analyze how each school employee interprets the changes that COVID-19 has brought to the school.

Research Quality and Ethical Considerations

Ensuring that this research is trustworthy will take plenty of effort by the investigator, but this will result in a research paper that maintains a number of criteria for trustworthiness:

The credibility of this research will be maintained throughout various phases of the case study, and a number of methods will test this. The investigator will clearly explain their positionality with the research topic, such as their personal experience with the Individualized Education Plan system. To ensure that the completeness of this research, including data collection and analysis, is not rushed, the researcher will maintain contact with the research participants for an extended period of time (around two months). The purpose of this is to observe the data's consistency as the research period continues. In addition to this, research findings and analysis will be periodically shared with participants and peers to collect feedback and check the consistency and validity of the data collected. Through the use of multiple methods, triangulation of data should be possible, as the inclusion of written procedures and the experiences of staff will show multiple viewpoints for the purpose of the study.

To establish dependability in this research, context and supplemental information will be provided for any raw data that may bring confusion to readers. In addition to this, the researcher will describe any problems that came during the research process.

In order to maintain this research's confirmability, the researcher needs to highlight their own experiences with the Individualized Education Plan system. Because this is an exploratory-based case study, the researcher will ensure that no personal biases are present, as the research is only comprised of observations of content outside of the researcher's professional domain.

This study's intent is to analyze *only* the documentation policies and procedures for the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process; absolutely no Personally Identifiable Information (PII) of students will be collected, nor requested, for the protection of their privacy. In addition to this, IEP documents containing *any* student information, such as IEP goal scoring, will not be collected, in order to mitigate concerns for breach of privacy. For documents that would be used on students, only blank templates will be requested for review. In addition, any information regarding the school and its staff will be anonymized in publications to protect them from being identified by individuals outside of the study.

Timetable, Resources, and Budget

Timetable

The following timeline information portrays the projected schedule made by the investigator at the time of IRB submission. Preliminary outreach attempts to the first round of school districts in the Research Triangle area were made in the first half of December 2020.

	October 2020		November 2020		December 2020		January 2021		February 2021		March 2021		April 2021 - PAPERS DUE 4/9	
Finalize proposal														
Submit IRB application														
Collect study data														
Analyze study data														
Write the paper														
Submit draft to advisor														
Revise, submit final draft														

- Finalized proposal and IRB application was submitted on November 13.
- The projected timeline for data collection will have a range of two months (December 2020 – January 2021).
 - In the event of delayed interaction between the researcher and the research participants, planning has been made to accommodate additional time for

data collection. If more time is needed, time for data collection can extend as far as of March 31, 2021.

- Data analysis will partly coincide with data collection, and should be fully completed a month after data collection is completed. (February 2021)
- The drafts for the master's paper will be written around the end of the analysis period, and will be periodically submitted to the thesis advisor (Denise Anthony) over the course of two months. (February 2021 – March 2021)
- Finalized revision of the master's paper will be submitted by April 30, 2021.

Resources

For this case study, there are a variety of resources that would have been utilized to conduct and maintain research. During the data collection and analysis processes, the investigator's personal computer, and if permissible, a cloud storage service, would have been used to store any digital information. Research documents would be contained in a shared folder, and would be organized based on the context of the information, such as interviews, IEP templates, and etc. This personal computer would also be used for writing the drafts of the master's paper, and Microsoft Office products, such as Microsoft Word and OneNote, would be used for this purpose. If needed, this personal computer would be used for electronic communication, such as email (Microsoft Outlook) and video chat (Zoom, Skype, and etc.). Access to this personal computer is password protected, and is only accessible by the investigator and those involved in the case study.

The investigator will use Zotero to maintain the resources needed for the literature review, and the references page will be created from this service.

Budget

Funds required for research, such as commuting costs, supplies, and etc., would be provided by the researcher. Financial costs for commuting would have varied based on distance travelled to the school, as well as the frequency of visits. Supplies for data collection, analysis, and paper creation have been allocated; no additional funds are needed for this. There are no external resources that place a substantial financial burden on the researcher, as they will be provided by the research participants (IEP information).

Impact, Limitations, and Delimitations

Impact

This case study's intent was to analyze how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Individualized Education Plan (IEP) documentation. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, observation and documentation of a student's IEP were conducted through in-person interaction; however, this is not possible for teachers, associates, and administration that are conducting remote instruction. As a result of this, there is the possibility of students' needs not always being met, which may affect the accuracy and effectiveness of IEP documentation. Those directly affected by the IEP system (stakeholders) are students, parents, and school administration.

The potential for further research or projects will be influenced by the findings of this case study. For example, if the observed changes in IEP documentation are not sufficient enough in quality to maintain its perceived accuracy, the existing policies and procedures may be called upon for reevaluation and adjustment.

Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and an emphasis on social distancing to lower the spread of the virus, face-to-face interaction were not available for the investigator. Research methods for the case study, such as interviews, surveys, and etc. would have likely been conducted over electronic means (email, over the phone, video chat services,

and etc.). The possibility of in-person contact will be dependent on the permissions granted by the school or school district.

Delimitations

As this exploratory study would have been a case study, only one school's Individualized Education Plan documentation policies and procedures would have been evaluated. As stated in Methodology, this was due to the possibility of policies and procedures being different among schools/school systems. While IEPs may be similar in format between schools, their methodologies may be inconsistent with one another, and this probability would increase as more schools are observed.

For ease of access, schools in the North Carolina Research Triangle area (Durham, Orange, and Wake counties) would have been given priority for outreach. This decision was made in the event that a school would allow the investigator to visit in-person to view IEP documents. If no schools in the area allow such interactions, then the search radius may be increased to locate in-person opportunities. However, due to COVID-19 limiting the amount of in-person interactions with certain establishments, this may not be a possible method of contact.

In addition to this, a requirement for participation in this case study was related to the school's mode of instruction; the observed school should have had remote instruction as a part of their curriculum for the 2020-2021 school year. If the school in question practiced a hybrid curriculum (part-time remote, part-time in-person), the study would have primarily focused on its policies and procedures for remote instruction. In order to strictly analyze in-person and online differences, priority for the case study would have been given to schools that were strictly on an online curriculum.

Outcome

Outreach to school districts in the Research Triangle area began during the first half of December 2020. Earlier attempts of outreach could not be made, due to the investigator's pending research approval by the IRB, which was not granted until the end of November 2020. Considering that these attempts of recruitment took place shortly before the public-school system's winter break, the investigator expected delays in responses. Before the projected breaks had begun, a couple of districts had sent responses, however, most of them were sent to inform the investigator of their halting in accepting research requests. One district had requested more information about the research, such as the investigator's IRB packet, but ultimately decided that the case study was not a good fit for them.

In the middle of January 2021, the investigator began to resend requests for research to the districts that had failed to send responses. After this second attempt, more responses were collected, with the same message of halting their requests for research. At the end of this round of recruitment attempts, the investigator noted that around half of the total contacted school districts had sent responses, while the other half still had no response whatsoever. The investigator believes this lack of response may have been due to technical problems; since the investigator's email address was outside of a school district's domain, there is a chance that their attempts to recruit the district were sent to spam folders, or some similar location.

In a final attempt to recruit subjects, the investigator decided to branch out to school districts outside of the Research Triangle. These newly contacted districts were located around Cumberland County, which is the investigator's hometown. Out of the schools in this area, only one response was collected, which, once again, also relayed the halting of accepting research requests.

The circumstances of the recruiting process were unfortunate, and the research was essentially shutdown due to lack of willing participants.

Drawing from past experiences as a special education associate, in addition to taking graduate courses online during the COVID-19 pandemic, the investigator has theorized that a number of elements may have a hand in altering an Individualized Education Plan's documentation process. The accuracy, integrity, and completeness of these records are potentially at stake, and the following elements are worth investigating:

- The educator's ability to provide online instruction or support to elementary school students. Teachers and associates have been trained to interact with students at many levels; for students in IEP programs, they may require educators to provide closer support to the student. With the limitations of remote learning, teachers and associates are no longer able to offer this level of support, and providing the services associated with it are harder to achieve.
- The student's academic and behavioral performance over virtual interactions. Like teachers, students in the public-school system have been acclimated to traditional classroom settings since they entered the system. Consequently, the transition to remote learning may have stunted their abilities to perform at normal levels.

- The student's, or even educator's, access to a stable internet connection.

Households do not have the same resources needed for online interactions. The household's level of income and geographic location can affect the quality of internet connection available to students, and lower-tiered connections create roadblocks.

In addition to these potential causes, periods of adjustment would have been an area of interest for this research. As schools continue to offer remote options for students, it is assumed that the school system's understanding and efficiency of IEP documentation would not be the same as when the pandemic was declared in March 2020. A closer look into different time periods during the pandemic's first year in the United States could have provided insightful information.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, due to research restrictions set by several school districts in the surrounding the investigator's vicinity, the ability to collect data through interviewing subjects and examining pre-established content was not possible at this time. While some school districts were not responsive to the investigator's outreach attempts, others politely declined any possibility of interaction, as their intentions were to maintain the physical and mental well-being of their staff members. Some school districts are expecting to accept requests for research later in the year (around July or August 2021), however these estimated dates were not plausible for the investigator's time constraints.

To reiterate, the purpose of this research aimed to highlight any key differences in documenting a student's Individualized Education Plan record between a traditional classroom setting and virtual learning procedures. COVID-19 continues to cause hardships for those in the United States, and in an educational setting, it is vital to observe its effects on teachers and students alike. Due to personal interactions between staff and students, Individualized Education Plans and its documentation can have sensitive processes, and sudden changes, such as the jump to virtual learning in 2020, can affect its accuracy and completeness.

Notes

ⁱ An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a document that serves to provide special accommodations for the academic and social needs of a student.

ⁱⁱ “Specials” refer to classes that are not typically taught by the student’s “main” teacher(s). These can include music, art, and physical education classes.

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Appendix A. School Recruitment Email

Good morning,

My name is Chris Cosgrove, and I am a Master of Science in Information Science candidate with a concentration in Archives & Records Management at UNC-Chapel Hill. As a former special education associate, I am curious about the effects COVID-19 has placed on the documentation procedures for Individualized Education Plan(s) (IEPs) records, and have decided to make this the focus of my master's paper. I am reaching out to you in the hopes of working with your school district for an exploratory case study.

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine the effects of COVID-19 on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) documentation process. Through content analysis and comparison of IEP documentation procedures, in addition to interviews with elementary school staff, this research aims to highlight any key differences between procedures both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. **No student information will be requested during these processes.**

A vital part of this research is working with a school that is instructing students virtually, as well as having at least one staff member in these categories: (1) special education teacher, (2) general education teacher, and (3) special education assistant/associate. If your school district does not have any schools with these criteria, please let me know via email.

Please relay this information to the appropriate authorities. Attached to this email are forms that further details the nature of this research, as well as sections that request permission to work with your school district/school/staff members. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at chcosgrv@live.unc.edu. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Chris Cosgrove

Appendix B. Consent Form

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Chris Cosgrove, and I am a Master of Science in Information Science student with a concentration in archives and records management at UNC-Chapel Hill. As a former special education associate, I am curious about the effects COVID-19 has placed on the documentation procedures for Individualized Education Plan(s) (IEPs) records, and have decided to make this the focus of my master's paper. I am reaching out to you in the hopes of working with your school, or school district, for an exploratory case study.

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine the effects of COVID-19 on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) documentation process. Through content analysis and comparison of IEP documentation procedures, in addition to interviews with elementary school staff, this research aims to highlight any key differences between procedures both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. You will be asked to take part in a research study because they are, or hold a position that is similar to, one of the following:

- A special education teacher
- A general education teacher
- A special education assistant/associate
- An administrator*

Being in a research study is completely voluntary. You can choose not to be in this research study. You can also say yes now and change your mind later.

*If you are an administrator, you will not be asked to participate in the main portion of this case study. You are being contacted for a request to conduct research in your school or school district.

Data Collection

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to share your experiences with the IEP process through an interview process, and if applicable, providing access and explanation to various template IEP documents.

Interviews will include questions regarding your responsibilities and general details about your work environment, such as your daily routine, your involvement with IEPs, and your opinion on the changes being made as a result of online learning. This interview process will take at most forty-five (45) minutes; however, length of this process will depend on the amount of information shared by the subject. For consideration of the subject's time, the interview will stop at the forty-five (45) minute mark.

In addition to the interview process, interactions with subjects regarding template IEP and data collection examination will take at most forty-five (45) minutes. For consideration of the subject's time, this instance of interaction will stop at the forty-five (45) minute mark.

We expect that at least three people will take part in this research study. Our goal is to collect information from three different roles within your community, and your credentials fall under one of these roles.

You can choose not to answer any questions they do not wish to answer. You can also choose to stop the interview at any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

Risks

The possible risks to you in taking part in this research are:

- Loss of confidentiality of data: school staff that are not involved in the study may be able to identify subjects based on basic credentials and experiences collected. To combat this, any personal identifiable information will not be used in publications, and will be replaced with unique identifiers that are anonymized.
- Loss of reputation or standing: In the event that a community member is able to identify subjects based on experiences, said community members will be able to make assumptions or judgments based on the information that is published.

Benefits

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You will not benefit personally from being in this research study.

Privacy & Confidentiality

To protect your identity as a research subject, the investigator will not share your information with any unauthorized individuals or groups, any identifiable information will be anonymized and given a unique identifier (Teacher 1, Subject A, etc.). In addition, in any publication about this research, any personal identifiable information will not be used.

To protect the identity of students that have an Individualized Education Plan, the investigator *will not* request any information that has any personal identifiable information pertaining to them. The investigator's ability to view this information will be avoided at all costs; only template and fully redacted information will be requested for comparison.

Consent Request for Audio Recording

For transcription purposes, the investigator will request that the processes involved in content analysis and interviews be audio recorded on the investigator's personal computer. Recordings will solely be used to assist the investigator in note-taking and data collection for the study's purpose of policy and procedure comparison.

Being recorded is not a requirement, and subjects can opt in or out at any time during the content analysis or interview processes. If participation of the subject stops during these processes, destruction of the recording may happen *only if* the recording is solely focused on the subject; if there is more than one subject being recorded, the investigator cannot remove your participation as it is part of a group. To avoid this, interactions from the investigator will be made with one subject at a time.

Recordings of subjects will be kept on the investigator's personal computer for the duration of the study and master's paper writing processes; expected end date of this study and submission of master's paper is April 30, 2021. Upon completion of this case study, all research documents (including recordings) will be transferred to the appropriate authorities and/or be destroyed from the investigator's personal computer.

For Research Subjects (excluding school/school district administration)

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ OK to record me during the study

_____ Not OK to record me during the study

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Consent Request from School/School District

*For School/School District Administration Only**

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ We grant permission for research to be conducted in our school/school district

_____ We do not grant permission for research to be conducted in our school/school district

**For school administration, if permission to conduct research has been granted, please forward a copy of your completed form to staff members that hold the title as a special education teacher, general education teacher, or special education assistant/associate.*

School/School District Name

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Consent Request from School Staff

For School Staff (excluding school/school district administration) Only:

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ I wish to participate in this case study as a test subject as:
_____ a special education teacher
_____ a general education teacher
_____ a special education assistant/associate

_____ I do not wish to participate in this case study

If you wish to participate in this case study as a subject, please forward a copy of this completed form to the investigator, Christopher Cosgrove, to chcosgrv@live.unc.edu, in addition to your availability for the content analysis and interview processes.

School Name

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the Investigator named at the top of this form by calling (910) 583-6773 or emailing chcosgrv@live.unc.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UNC Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to future correspondence.

Chris Cosgrove

Appendix C. Interviews

This interview is open-ended, and additional questions may arise from the current questions listed below:

- What can you tell me about your credentials? This can include:
 - Number of years in public education
 - Number of years at this school
 - How long you've worked with Individualized Education Plans
 - What is your role with IEPs?
- How many students are you normally working with at once? For example:
 - One-on-one interaction
 - Small group
 - Large group (entire classroom)
- What is your role in the implementation of IEPs? For example, are you someone who:
 - Provides instruction to an entire classroom
 - Provides instruction to a smaller group (or an individual)
 - Observes students without instruction
 - A combination
- For students with IEPs, do you document their performance during your time with them?
 - What does that look like?
 - Where do you record performance?
 - When do you record performance?
- During remote instruction, what does a typical day look like to you?
 - Is your schedule consistent?
 - Or does it often change?
- Do you face any challenges with teaching remotely?
 - If so, what are they?
- How were students with IEPs evaluated before COVID-19?
 - Is this accomplished on paper? Digitally?
- How are students with IEPs being evaluated now?
 - Is this accomplished on paper? Digitally?
- In your opinion, has there been a significant change in IEP evaluation since the COVID-19 outbreak?
 - If so, do you think that this change has affected the IEP's accuracy (either in a positive or negative manner)?